DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 080 PS 025 168

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TITLE Parents as Early Partners in the Literacy Process.
PUB DATE [95]
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the National Conference on Family Literacy (5th).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Emergent Literacy; *Literacy; Models; National Surveys; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Role; Parents as Teachers; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Racial Differences; Sex Differences; Socioeconomic Influences
IDENTIFIERS *National Household Education Survey

ABSTRACT

This paper presents national survey results on the role of parents in the emerging literacy of preschool children, and outlines the Strengths Model for Learning in young children. According to data from the 1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES), the percentage of children displaying signs of emerging literacy and small motor skills increased with age within the 3- to 5-year-old population. More girls than boys demonstrated each of the literacy skills (identifying primary colors, recognizing letters, counting to 20, pretending to or reading stories, and writing own name). Hispanic and black students showed fewer signs of emerging literacy, although these deficits were wholly accounted for by related risk factors such as poverty and low maternal education. The strengths model of learning focuses on a family support plan to encourage emergent literacy skills in preschool children through choice and competent decision-making, follow through on choices, knowledge of curricular and life-long opportunities, reflection and self-evaluation, self-attribution, and acceptance of responsibility for choices and actions. An individualized family service plan protocol is included. (MDM)

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PARENTS AS EARLY PARTNERS IN THE LITERACY PROCESS

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Fifth Annual National Conference on Family Literacy

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Parents As Early Partners in the Literacy Process

According to data collected in January through April 1993, as part of the National Household Education Survey (NHES), the percentage of children displaying signs of emerging literacy and small motor skills increases with age within the 3- to 5-year-old population and within months of age among 4-year-olds. The NHES is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education. Westat, Inc., conducted the survey for NCES (Zill, Collins, West and Hausken, 1995).

In the survey more girls than boys demonstrated each of the literacy and small-motor skills covered, and more boys than girls exhibit signs of physical activity-attention difficulties or speech difficulties.

Hispanic preschoolers were reported to show fewer signs of emerging literacy and more indication of physical activity-attention difficulties, and to be in less good general health than white non-Hispanic or Black non-Hispanic children. Black non-Hispanic preschoolers show fewer signs of emerging literacy than white non-Hispanic preschoolers. However, racial differences are wholly accounted for by related risk factors, such as low maternal education, poverty, and single parenthood (Zill, Collins, West and Hausken, 1995).

Five sociodemographic risk factors relating to family are examined in the study:

* mother has less than a high school education;
* family is below the official poverty line;
* mother speaks a language other than English as her primary language;
* mother was unmarried at the time of the child's birth; and
* only one parent is present in the home.

Zill, et al., conclude in the summary: "As previous studies have shown, existing preschool programs have beneficial effects in the area of emerging literacy and numeracy. But they do not appear to be ameliorating the behavioral, speech, and health difficulties of preschoolers. ...When compared to low family income, the risk factors of low maternal education, minority language status, and family structure were often as good or better predictors of the child's developmental accomplishments and difficulties" (pg. 38).

The NHES survey shows a phenomenal percentage growth in literacy skills between ages 3 and 5 for preschoolers who have not yet entered kindergarten or primary school.

A variety of influences are responsible for developing a child's emerging skills. One of the major factors in this process is the structure of the family. Parents are the child's first teachers. Even though the number of children attending formal preschool programs is increasing, the family influence makes a more profound impact on the child's development than other caregivers (see Figure 1).

Percentage of Preschoolers with Developmental Accomplishments As Reported by Parents				
Characteristic	**All preschoolers**	**3-year-olds**	**4-year-olds**	**5-year-olds**
Estimated number of children (thousands)	8,579	3,889	3,713	976
Literacy-numeracy indicators	78%	69%	84%	89%
Identifies primary colors	44%	27%	57%	66%
Recognizes most or all letters	52%	37%	62%	78%
Counts to 20	70%	65%	73%	79%
Pretends to read or reads stories*				
Writes own name, even if some letters are backwards	50%	22%	70%	84%
Small-motor indicators	89%	83%	93%	94%
Can button his/her clothes	91%	87%	34%	94%
Holds pencil properly				
Writes/draws, rather than scribbles	66%	50%	78%	84%
Health status	88%	88%	88%	87%
Excellent, very good	12%	12%	12%	13%
Good, fair, or poor				

*Includes telling connected stories when pretending to read and reading actual words.
Note: Preschoolers are 3- to 5-year-olds who have not yet entered kindergarten or primary school.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. National Household Education Survey, 1993.

Figure 1

"The Right Stuff"

Greenberg (1991) observes that "infants and toddlers need adults' emotional focus, warmth, and steady good-natured calmness, people who appear self-centered or distracted by problems in their own lives, essentially angry, cold rigid, humorless, or unusually anxious, are not good bets if optimal development in all dimensions is the goal. Parents and caregivers (some inadvertently and some intentionally) reproduce the social strategies for daily living that make sense for them in the world as they see it from their socioeconomic position" (pg. 4). Research shows that as with parent-child relationships, teachers who engage in sensitive, responsive, and involved interactions with children are likely to develop secure attachments with them (Elicker J. & Fortner-Wood, November, 1995).

"Speaking of families--well, families are one of the most important points pertaining to infants and toddlers to speak of," (Greenberg, 1991).

The development of language--first nonverbal, then verbal--is an essential element in early childhood. According to Greenberg (1991) constant efforts should be made to:

- connect in warm and mutually trusting ways with appreciative parents and caregivers--to develop a feeling of inclusion, a basic human need.

- cause parents, caregivers and others to respond to the signals and grins the little ones give--and soon to their words, phrases and sentences--in order to develop a feeling of personal effectiveness.

Strengths Model for Learning

Potts (1995) recommends a Strengths Model for Learning and points out that "with all good intentions we have been delivering adult education within the parameters of a deficit model."

We as educators have not considered adult learning styles in our attempt to recruit parents as partners in their childrens' developmental learning process. In many ways we have "turned off" parents who could have been ready allies. As a concerned parent Susan Rocco (1994) states, "In or out of the room, I was always assigned the role of the observer. I guess I was lucky, though. Some of my friends whose kids went to other programs were not allowed even to observe the assessment process. We parents decided that the team was afraid we'd learn the assessment protocol and cheat by teaching our child the specific skills required by the assessment. They were right, you know. I spent fruitless hours between evaluations trying to get Jason to stack four blocks or to point to the flashcard with the red wagon. It didn't dawn on me to tell the assessment team that there were no red wagons in our real life" (pg. 13).

Anne Golden (1993), a parent and guest columnist for the Montgomery Advertiser states, "I

have often wished the regular education system was more like the special education system. I wish there were some way all parents could meet their child's teacher before school started, sit down and discuss their child's ability with the teacher and map out goals together. I feel all children in the school system should be able to rise as high and as fast as they are capable. I wish no child would be held back in any subject when he or she is capable of more."

Potts (1995) recommends a "Personal Action Plan" and a "Family Support Plan" as a part of the Strengths Model For Learning. The Family Literacy Strengths Model is comprised of a set of complex and distinguishing characteristics including attitudes about the environment in which the program is delivered, the process of goal setting, the assessment system, and instruction (see Figure 2).

Portfolio and authentic assessment is used in the strengths model because the instructional process is developed with participation by learners, and specifically for the learners in each project. According to Potts (1995) the portfolio is particularly useful in family literacy programs because it provides a way to document change in parent/child relationships.

The strengths model recommends the process of "plan-act-and monitor." A life skill which encourages:

* choice and competent decision-making;
* follow through on choices;
* knowledge of curricular and life-long opportunities;
* reflection and self evaluation;
* self-attribution;
* acceptance of responsibility for choices and actions.

"The Family Support Plans help learners to design and incorporate their goals into an action plan that recognizes the importance of the family system," Potts (1995) pg. 5.

Conclusion

Those of us who train teachers sometimes feel as though we are running in place, not progressing beyond the basics.

Carter and Curtis (1994) observe, "Looking in on a typical early childhood staff meeting, workshop, or college classroom, you are likely to see teacher training approached in what Brazilian educator Paulo Freire calls the 'banking method': the expert attempts to transfer and deposit rules and requirements and their skill and knowledge into the minds of those present. The content of these sessions focuses on predetermined stands, step-by-step techniques and prescribed curriculum models. Both the content and the method of these trainings reinforce the notion that to become a good teacher of young children, all you must

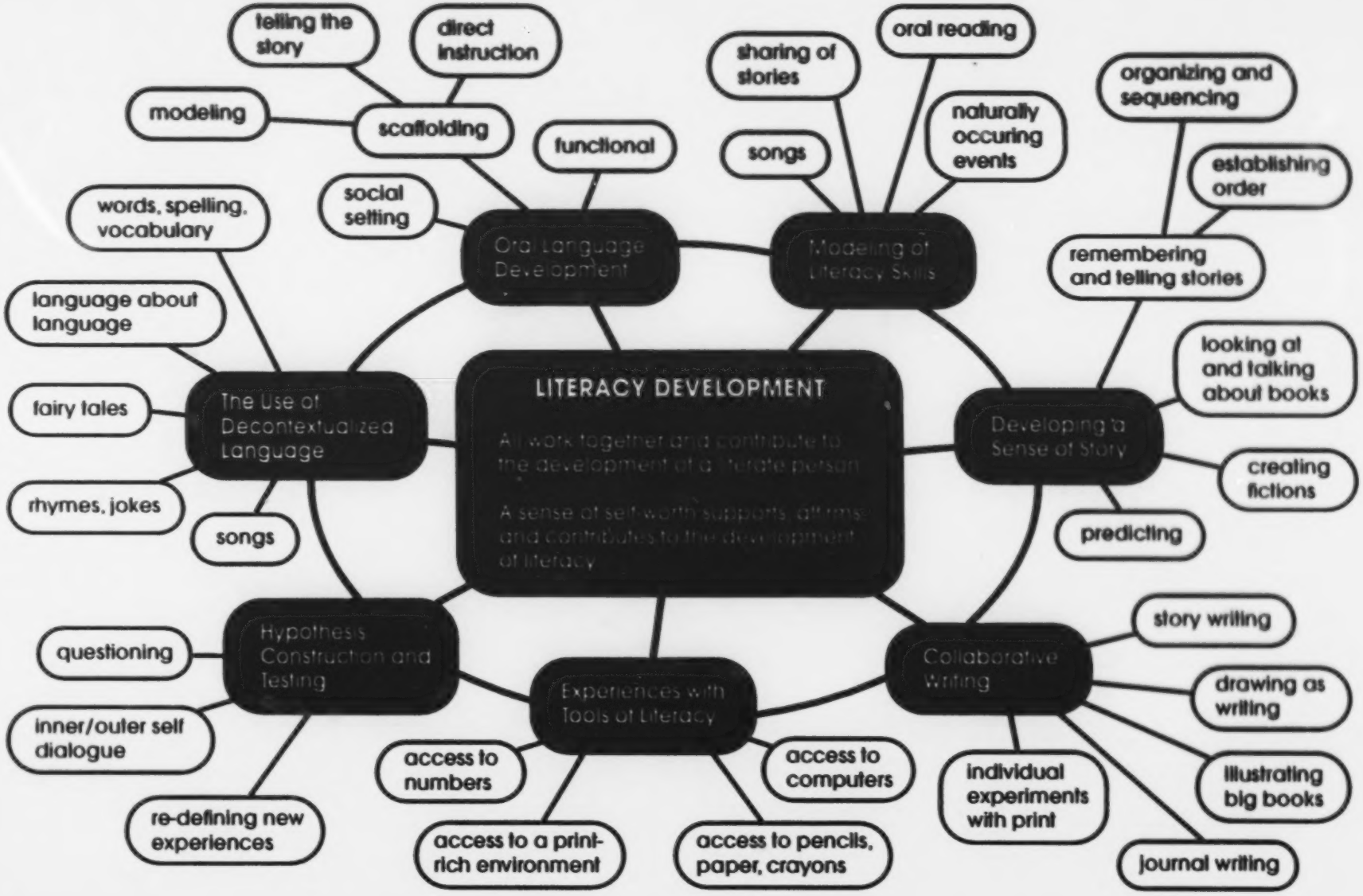
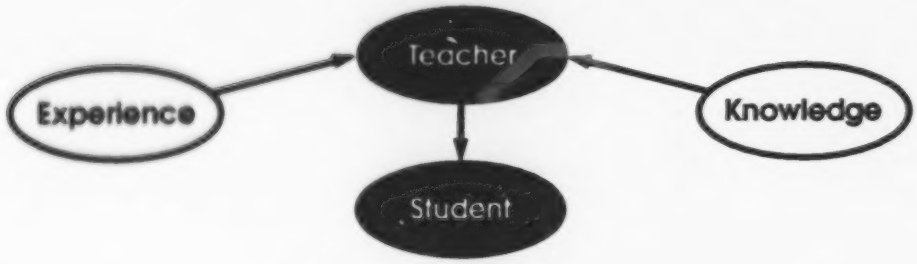


Figure 2 Potts, M.W. (1995, May). A Strengths Model for Learning. *Literacy Practitioner.* 4-8.

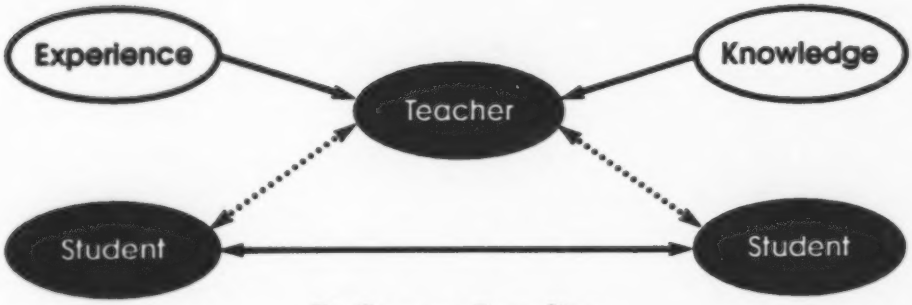
do is learn the information and master the techniques," Pg. 1.

We can visualize two converging freight trains one labeled "Traditional Education" and the other labeled "Developmental Education." These locomotives are bound for a head on collision. Traditional, conservative, back to basics proponents are in one train and the developmentally appropriate practices folks occupy the passenger car in the other. The pile up is happening at the crossing called early childhood education. It remains to be seen whether the larger and heavier traditional train will prevail over the stream/lined flyer coming to challenge it. Will the conservative, back-to-basic movement give way to School Year 2000 (see Figures 3 and 4)?

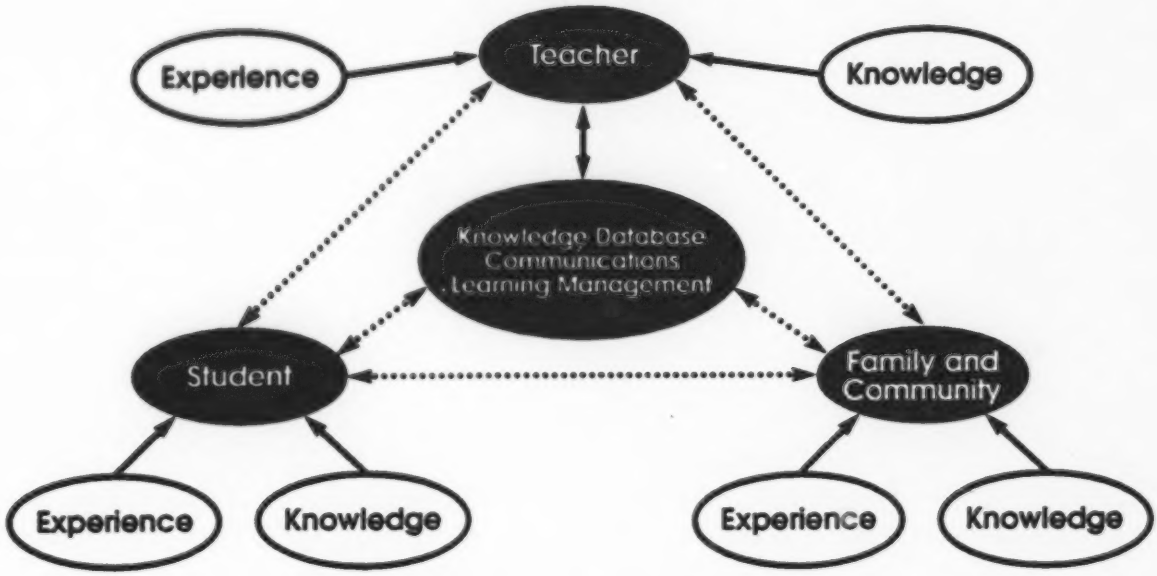
This is where the Strengths Model comes into the picture. We have to take the best of what we have and build on it. From the train wreckage we have to pick up the best of the reusable pieces and construct a new paradigm. Basic learning in a family literacy setting creates an educational environment that has fun!



A. Oral Tradition Paradigm

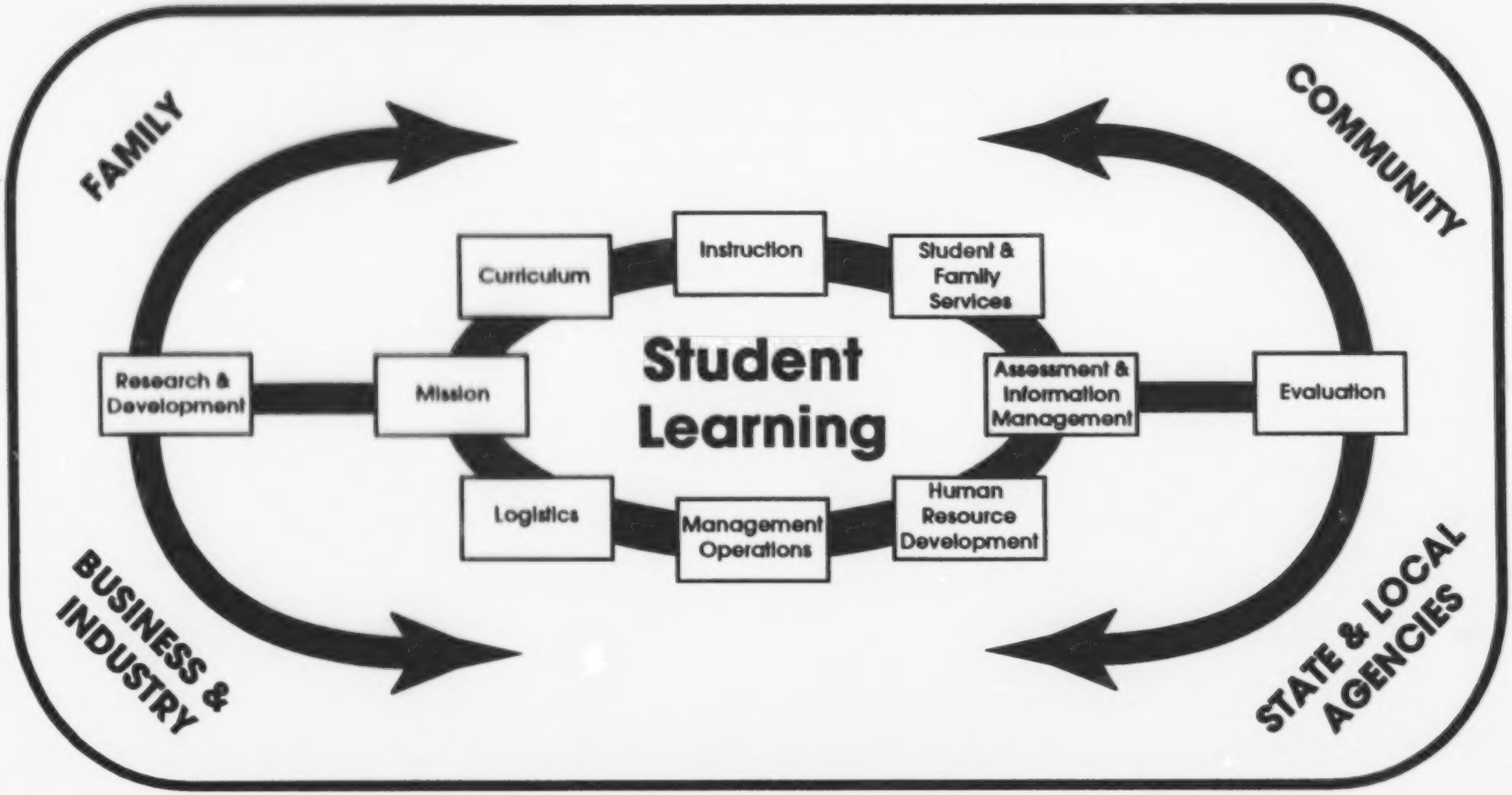


B. Current Paradigm



C. Technology-Based Paradigm

Figure 3



Schoolyear 2000 Operations Model

Figure 4

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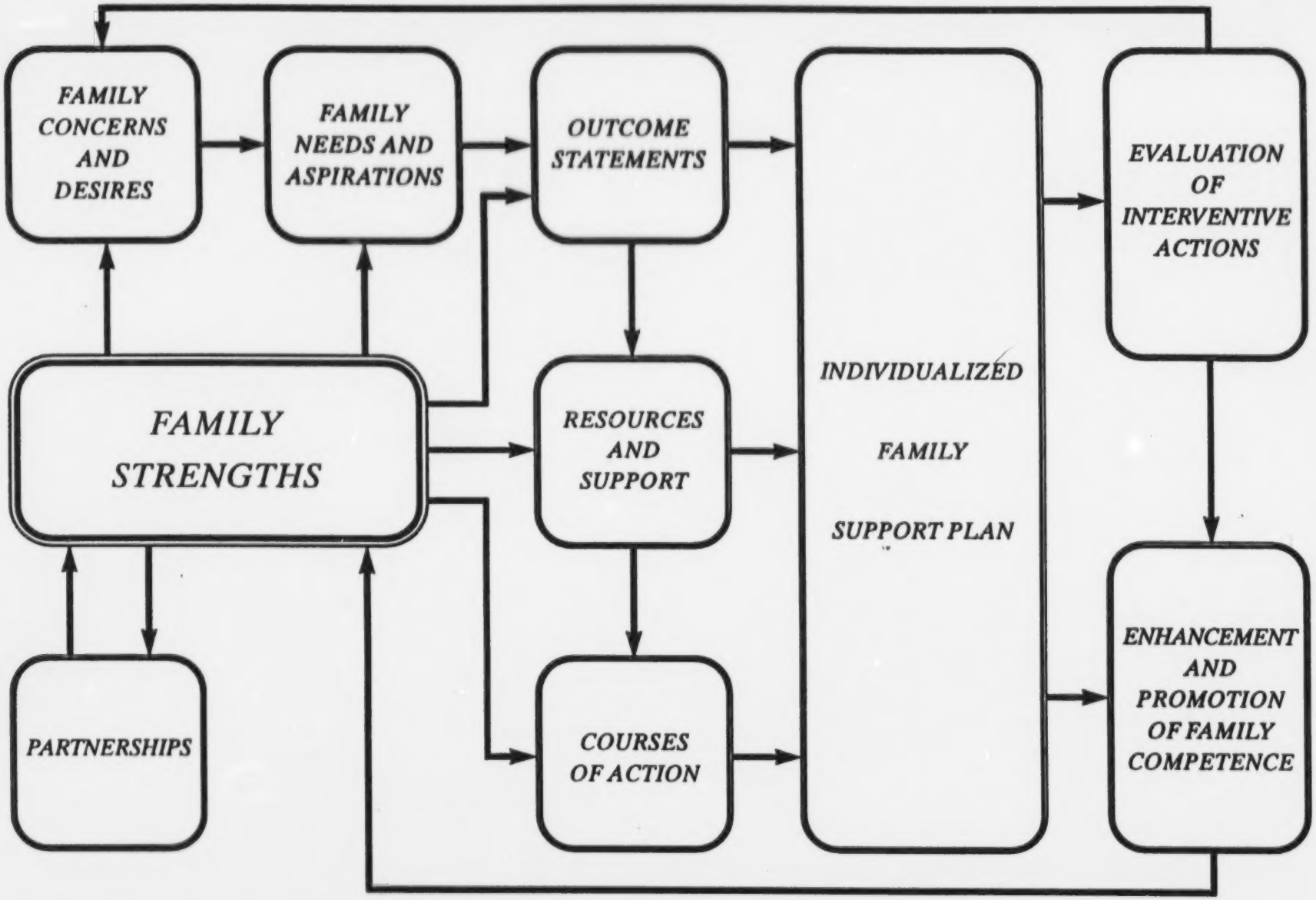
Kaplan COMPANIES



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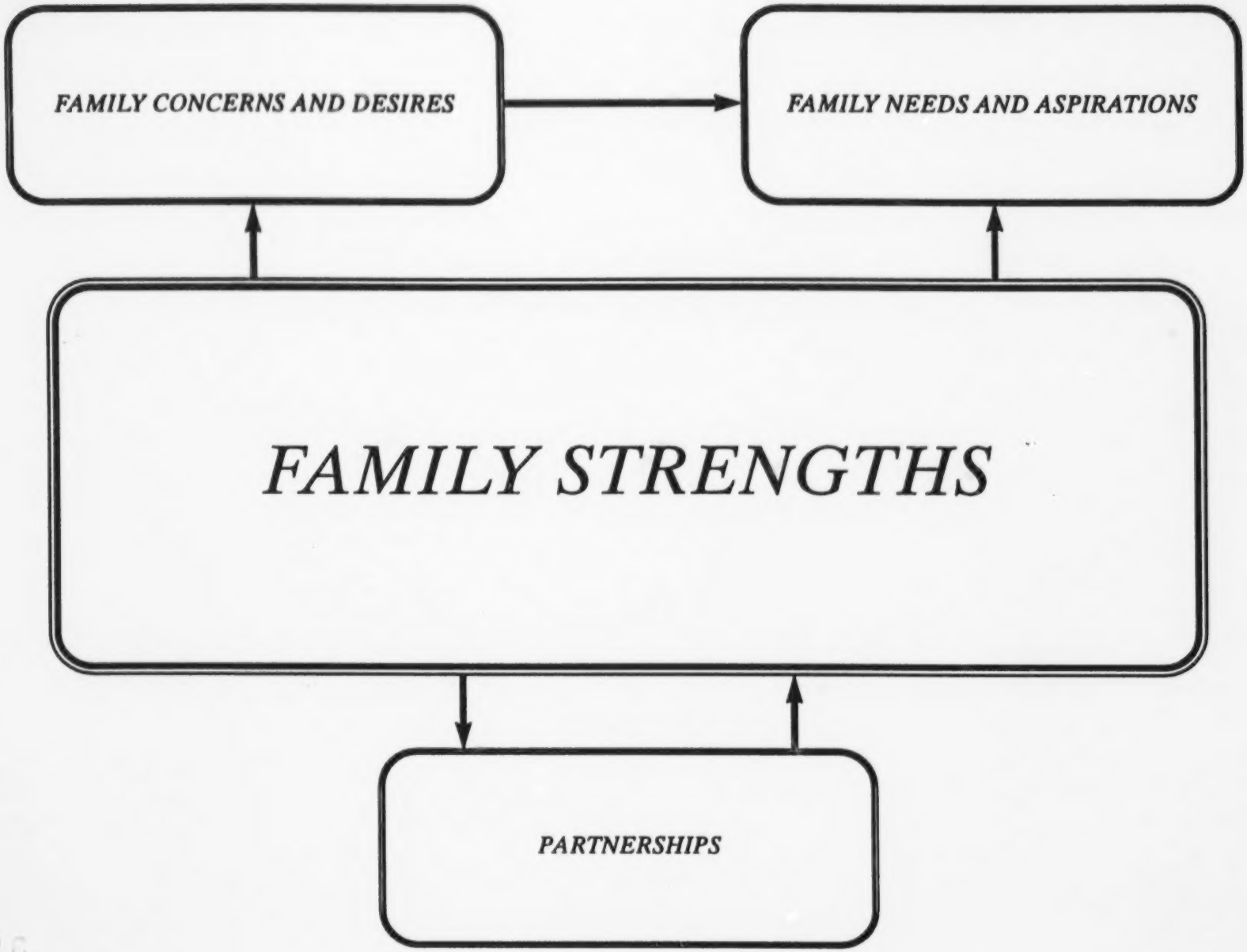
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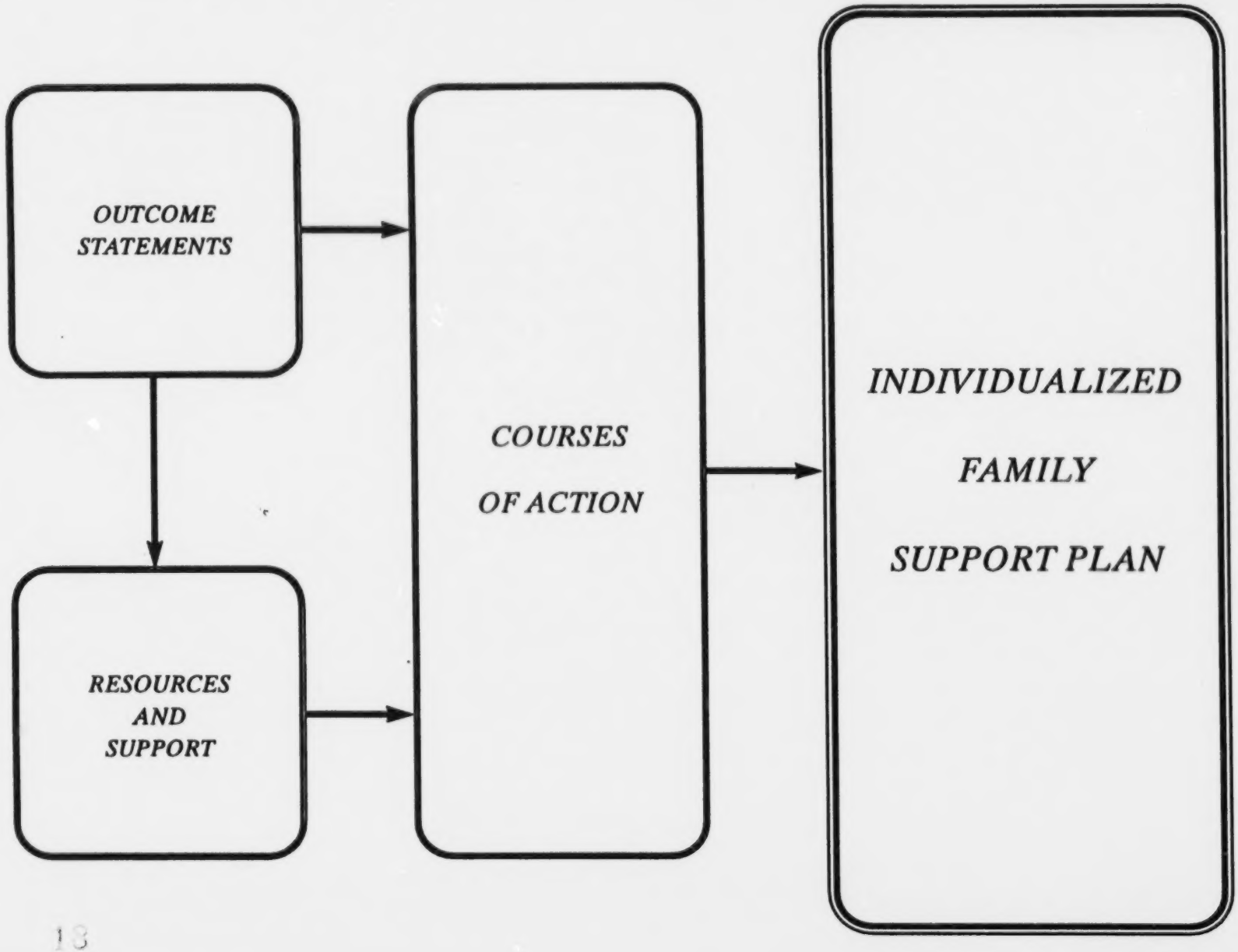
FAMILY NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS
FAMILY STRENGTHS
PARTNERSHIPS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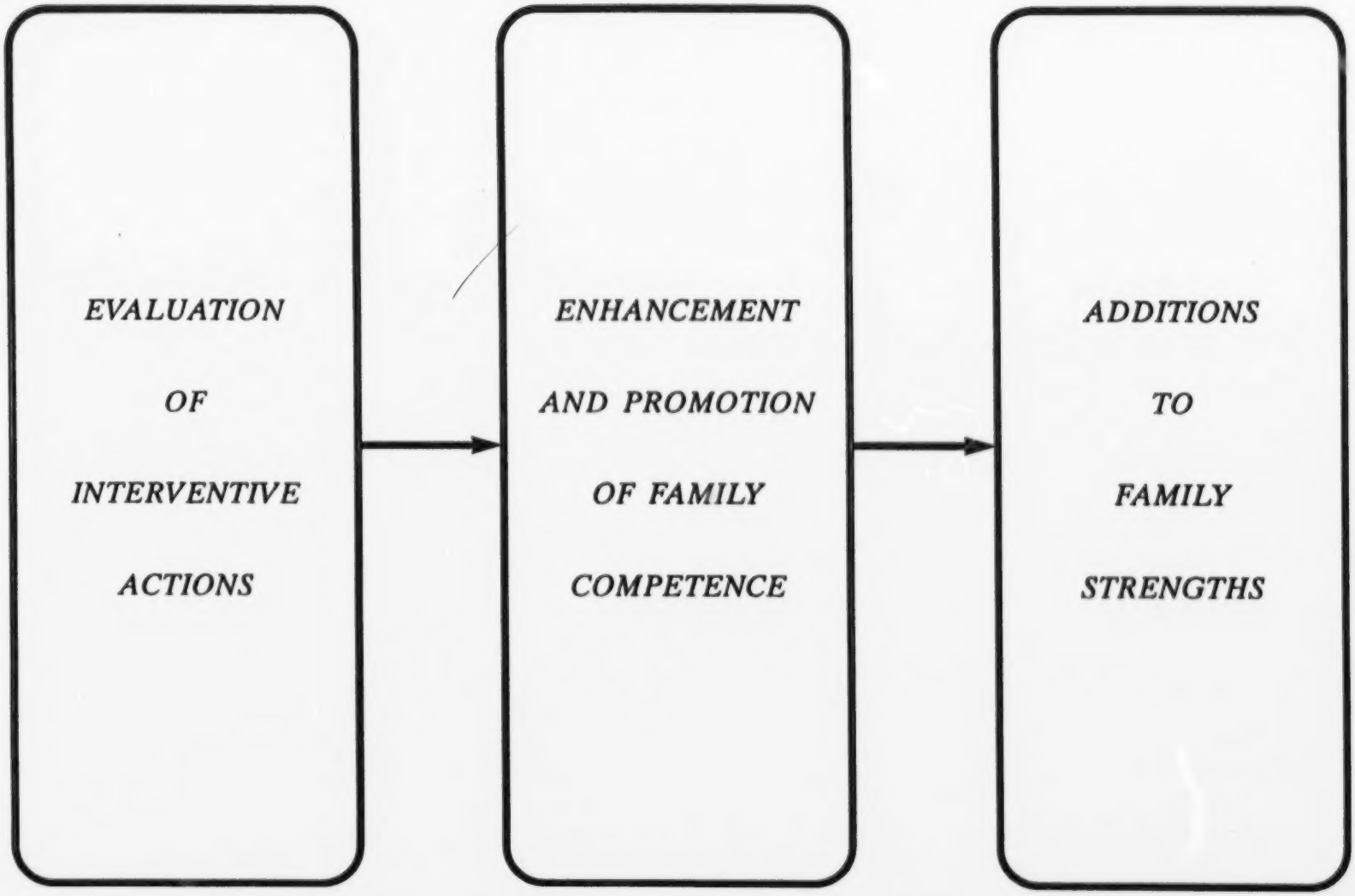
RESOURCES AND SUPPORT
COURSES OF ACTION
INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SUPPORT PLAN


EVALUATION OF INTERVENTIVE ACTIONS
ENHANCEMENT AND PROMOTION OF FAMILY COMPETENCE
ADDITIONS TO FAMILY STRENGTHS

ID# _____ **INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SERVICE PLAN** Page 1 of _____

Child's Name: _____ SS#: ___-___-____ School District of Residence: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: ____yrs. ____mos. Sex: ☐ M ☐ F Date of Last IFSP: _____ Date of This IFSP: _____

Parent/Guardian's Name: _____ Type of Meeting: ☐ Interim ☐ Initial ☐ Annual ☐ Other _____

Telephone: Home (___) _____ Work (___) _____ Service Coordinator: _____ Agency: _____

Address: _____ Apt. #: _____ This IFSP will be reviewed in 6 mos. (if sooner, give date) _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ and will be revised in one year (if sooner, give date) _____

Other Persons in the Home: _____ Child's Ethnic Heritage: _____ Native Language in Home: _____

Child's Strengths and Needs (briefly describe the results of pertinent evaluations)

AREA	STATUS	EVALUATOR	AGENCY	DATE
Medical/Health				
Hearing/Vision				
Fine & Gross Motor				
Communication				
Cognitive				
Social/Emotional				
Adaptive (self-help)				

Eligible for Part H services because of: ☐ an established condition ☐ a developmental delay ☐ meets special educational criteria as _____

If child might be eligible for Supplemental Security Income, follow-up regarding SSI will be done by: _____

Family's Concerns/Priorities/Resources Related to Enhancing the Child's Development (include this information only with the family's permission)

Resources/Supports:_____ Concerns/Needs:_____

COORDINATED SERVICES PLAN: Fill out as completely as possible, including all applicable information.

What would the family like to have happen next? How will everyone know if the goal has been reached?	What services or activities will be needed? Who will provide them? Where will they be provided?	When will they begin and end?	How often will they occur and for how long each time?	Who will pay (if payment is needed)?	Was the goal reached (give code* and date)?

*A = Attained to family's satisfaction S = Still a desired outcome N = No longer needed or appropriate

INDIVIDUALIZED FAMILY SERVICE PLAN Child's Name: _____ Page_____ of_____

Activities Related to the Child's Transition to a New Program/Service (if appropriate, and if not already described)

Other services needed but not considered Part H services (e.g. medical care, financial assistance) and funding sources of each. ***Note: Including these does not mean they must be provided under Part H.***

PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS IFSP:

FAMILY MEMBERS:

Printed Name	Relationship to Child

OTHERS:

Printed Name	Phone	Agency

Persons involved but not at the IFSP meeting	Phone	Agency

PARENTAL ACTION:

- ☐ I consent to all Part H services listed in this IFSP.
- ☐ My signature below confirms that I have been informed of my rights, including the right to decline some services and still receive others.
- ☐ I consent to sending this plan to the other persons/agencies providing services.

_____ Signature

_____ Date

Service Coordinator: _____

Agency: _____ Phone: _____

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

(to be attached to the Individualized Family Service Plan)

Child's Name:_____ Date of Birth:_____

Part H Service Coordinator:_____ IEP/IFSP Date:_____

Eligible for Special Education? ☐ Yes ☐ No Disability:_____ Rule 340.17 _____

Annual Goals and Short-term Objectives (with criteria, evaluation procedures and schedules):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Least Restrictive Environment Options Considered (at least 2):	Accepted	Rejected
☐ Home	☐	☐
☐ Support services in a non-special education setting	☐	☐
☐ Special education setting	☐	☐

Special education services/ programs to be provided:

_____ Rule 340.17 _____

_____ Rule 340.17 _____

_____ Rule 340.17 _____

Rationale for classroom placement if different from disability:_____

Parent/Guardian agreement with above:_____

Time in regular education:_*Not Applicable*_ Physical education:_*Not Applicable*_

PARTICIPANTS (signatures indicate attendance):

Parent/Guardian:_____

School District Representative/Designee:_____

Teacher:_____

MET Representative:_____

Others:_____

_____

Parental Consent and Receipt of Rights:_____ Date:_____

or disagreement and Request for Hearing:_____ Date:_____

Person responsible for implementation of IEP:_____

Location of Services:_____ Implementation Date:_____

Operating District: ☐ Agrees ☐ Disagrees _____ Date:_____

Signature of Supt./Designee

Resident District: ☐ Agrees ☐ Disagrees _____ Date:_____

Signature of Supt./Designee